

CZECH REPUBLIC 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, a supplement to the constitution, provides for freedom of religious conviction and states everyone has the right to change, abstain from, and freely practice religion, subject to potential limitations by law in the event of threats to “public safety and order, health and morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.” The law prohibits speech that incites hatred based on religion.

The Ministry of Culture (MOC) registered the Essenic Christian Church and rejected the applications of the Eleutherianism religious group and the Protestant Church of Saint Corona. The Prague Municipal Court rejected the appeal by the Ecclesia Risorum (Church of Laughter) of the MOC’s denial of its registration application; the group appealed the verdict to the Supreme Administrative Court. The Path of Guru Jara’s 2021 appeal to the same court to reverse the denial of its application also remained pending. In November, the government hosted a conference of countries that endorsed the 2009 Terezin Declaration on Holocaust-Era Assets and Related Issues. On International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, the Senate hosted a ceremony to remember Holocaust victims, and the foreign ministry, in collaboration with the Israeli government, commemorated Jewish diplomats who were murdered or persecuted during the Holocaust. The government continued to compensate religious groups for communal property confiscated by the communist regime. The opposition Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) Party and its leader, Tomio Okamura, continued to publicly criticize Islam and Muslim migrants.

A local nongovernmental organization (NGO), In IUSTITIA, received reports of two religiously motivated incidents in the first half of the year – both antisemitic hate crimes – compared with four (three against Jews, one against Muslims) in 2020. The government reported 37 antisemitic and seven anti-Muslim incidents in 2021, compared with 27 and nine incidents, respectively, in the previous year. The Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) reported 1,128 antisemitic incidents in 2021 – 29 percent more than in the previous year and 252 percent higher than in 2018 –including one case of assault, five of harassment, and three of vandalism; almost all the other incidents were of internet hate speech. In April, the

Budapest-based NGO Tom Lantos Institute issued the results of its regional antisemitism study, which concluded that 36 percent of 2,097 survey respondents ages 18-74 in the Czech Republic could be classified as moderately or strongly antisemitic.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom issues, including religious tolerance, with MOC officials and the special envoy for Holocaust issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy representatives discussed efforts to restore the former Jewish cemetery in Prostějov with local officials. Embassy and U.S. Department of State officials worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Terezin Declaration Conference. In a video address to the conference, the U.S. Secretary of State said that restitution and compensation through the Terezin Declaration help to memorialize the truth about Nazi atrocities, which must never again be repeated. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues and the Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Holocaust Issues attended the conference, citing the Czech Republic's considerable progress on restitution and remembrance issues and recommending further actions. Embassy officials met with Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders to reaffirm U.S. government support for religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.7 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2021 census, of the 70 percent of citizens who responded to the question about their religious beliefs, approximately 48 percent held none, 10 percent were Roman Catholic, 13 percent listed no specific religion, and 9 percent identified with a variety of religious faiths, including the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, other Christian churches, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. Academics estimate there are 10,000 Jews, while the FJC estimates there are 15,000 to 20,000. Leaders of the Muslim community estimate there are 10,000 Muslims, most of whom are immigrants. According to a 2018 report by the Pew Research Center based on a 2015 survey of 1,490 adults, 72 percent of persons do not identify with a religious group, 21 percent identify as Catholic, 3 percent as Protestant, 1 percent as Orthodox Christian, and 3 percent as "other" or did not know or refused to answer.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution does not explicitly address religious freedom, but the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, a supplementary constitutional document, provides for freedom of religious conviction and the fundamental rights of all, regardless of faith or religion. It states every individual has the right to change religion or faith; to abstain from religious belief; and to freely practice religion, alone or in community, in private or public, “through worship, teaching, practice, or observance.” The charter defines religious societies, recognizing their freedom to profess their faith publicly or privately and to govern their own affairs, independently of the state. It stipulates conscientious objectors may not be compelled to perform military service and that conditions for religious instruction at state schools shall be set by law. The charter states religious freedom may be limited by law in the event of threats to “public safety and order, health and morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.”

The law states the MOC Department of Churches is responsible for religious affairs. Religious groups are not required by law to register with the government and are free to perform religious activities without registering. The law establishes a two-tiered system for religious groups that choose to register with the ministry. The ministry reviews applications for first- and second-tier registration with input from other government bodies such as the Office for Protection of Private Data and from outside experts on religious affairs. While the law sets a 30-day deadline for administrative decisions, it allows for extensions that can delay decisions indefinitely. Applicants denied registration may appeal to the Minister of Culture to reconsider its decision and, if denied again, to the courts.

To qualify for the first (lower) tier, a religious group must present at least 300 signatures of adult members permanently residing in the country, a founding document listing the basic tenets of the faith, and a clearly defined structure of fiduciary responsibilities to the Department of Churches. First-tier registration confers limited tax benefits, including exemptions from taxes on interest earned on current account deposits, donations, and members’ contributions.

For second (higher) tier registration, a group must have been registered with the Department of Churches as a first-tier group for 10 years, have published annual

financial reports for 10 years prior to the second-tier application, and have membership equal to at least 0.1 percent of the population, i.e., approximately 10,700 persons. The group must provide this number of signatures as proof. Second-tier registration entitles religious groups to the tax benefits granted to first-tier groups and the exercise of special rights, including conducting weddings, teaching religion at public schools, and conducting chaplaincy services in the army and prisons. Prisoners may receive visits from their own clergy, regardless of registration status. Second-tier religious groups registered prior to 2002 are entitled to government subsidies. The law phases out direct state subsidies to second-tier religious groups over a 17-year period ending in 2029.

Religious groups registered prior to 2002 received automatic second-tier status without having to fulfill the requirements for second-tier registration. These groups must publish an annual report on the execution of special rights, including conducting weddings, teaching religion at public schools, and maintaining chaplaincy in the army and prisons.

There are 44 state-registered religious groups – 23 first and 21 second-tier.

Unregistered religious groups are free to assemble and worship but may not legally own property. Unregistered groups may form, and register as, civic associations to own and manage their property.

The law authorizes the government to return land or other property that was confiscated during the communist era and is still in the government's possession to 17 religious groups (the largest of which are the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, and Czechoslovak Hussite Church). The government estimates the total value of property in its possession eligible to be returned at 75 billion crowns (CZK) (\$3.4billion). The law also sets aside CZK 59 billion (\$2.7 billion) in compensation for property – mostly in possession of private persons or entities or local or regional governments – that cannot be returned, payable over a 30-year period ending in 2042. Based on an agreement among the affected religious groups, the law allocates approximately 79 percent of these funds to the Catholic Church and 21 percent to the other 16 groups. The law prescribed a one-year deadline ending in 2013 for religious groups to file restitution claims for confiscated property. The government agency in possession of a property for which a group has filed a restitution claim adjudicates that claim.

If the government agency rejects a property claim, the claimant may appeal the decision in court.

The law permits second-tier religious groups to apply through the MOC to teach religion in state schools if there is a demand for such classes. Eleven of the 21 second-tier groups have permission to teach religion classes. The religious groups provide the teachers, and the school pays their salaries. If a state school does not have enough funds to pay for its religious education teachers, religious groups pay for them. Student attendance at religious classes is optional. According to law, if seven or more students register for a particular religion class at the beginning of the school year, a school must offer that class to those who registered.

The government does not regulate religious instruction in private schools.

The law prohibits speech that incites hatred based on religion, as well as the denial of Nazi- and communist-era genocides and crimes. Violators may be sentenced to up to three years in prison. The law designates January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Religious workers who are not from European Economic Area countries or Switzerland must obtain long-term residence and work permits to remain in the country for more than 90 days. There is no special visa category for religious workers. Foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the conditions for a standard work permit.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In January, the MOC registered the Essenic Christian Church, which had applied for registration in 2021. In April, the MOC rejected a registration application from the Eleutherianism religious group, which had applied for registration earlier in the year. In September, the MOC rejected a registration application from the Protestant Church of Saint Corona, which had also applied for registration earlier in the year. In May, the Prague Municipal Court rejected a 2020 appeal filed by Ecclesia Risorum (Church of Laughter) against the MOC's 2019 and 2020 denials of its application for registration. The group appealed to the Supreme

Administrative Court. The case remained pending at year's end. An appeal filed by Path of Guru Jara (PGJ) in 2021 with the Supreme Administrative Court against the rejection by the Prague Municipal Court of its appeal against the MOC's registration denial also remained pending at year's end.

PGJ leader Jaroslav Dobeš and member Barbara Plášková, whose convictions for the rape of six women were upheld in the Olomouc Appellate Court in 2021, remained in immigration detention in the Philippines, where they continued to seek asylum. International arrest warrants by Czech authorities for the pair remained outstanding.

The government provided second-tier religious groups approximately CZK 3.25 billion (\$147 million): CZK 940 million (\$42.5 million) in government subsidies to 17 groups and CZK 2.31 billion (\$104.5 million) to 16 groups as compensation for communal property in private and state hands that would not be returned. Four of the 21 second-tier groups declined the government subsidy and were not eligible for compensation payments for lost property. The Baptist Union accepted the state subsidy, but while eligible to receive it, opted not to accept compensation for unreturned property. In addition, the MOC provided CZK 2.32 million (\$105,000) in grants for religiously oriented cultural activities in response to applications from various religious groups.

The government paid the annual allotment of CZK 20 million (\$905,000) of the total of CZK 100 million (\$4.5 million) earmarked for 2019-2023 as a contribution to the Endowment Fund for Holocaust Victims for projects focused on Holocaust remembrance and education, welfare for Holocaust victims, and care for Jewish monuments.

In October, the Prostějov city council issued an open call for bids to execute a preparatory study for the restoration of the former Jewish cemetery in the city that the MOC had designated a cultural monument. In late 2021, the Prostějov Municipal Assembly had approved the municipal budget, which included an earmark of CZK 350,000 (\$15,900) to fund the preparatory study.

The SPD and its leader, Tomio Okamura, continued to criticize Islam and Muslim migrants. In June, Okamura wrote in a statement published on his party's website that "Islam is a hateful ideology, and it is against our constitutional rights and

against our concept of civic rights... Muslims and Africans should stay living their way of life in their countries We do not want our people to be killed, raped, attacked, and robbed in [the] street as we see it in Western Europe.” In April, he stated on his party’s website in reaction to riots in Sweden that “the demonstrating Muslim immigrants prove that Islam is not a religion of peace, but of hatred.”

In June, the government approved the *2021 Report on Extremism and Hate Crime*. Government agencies continued to work in accordance with the *2021-2026 Strategy to Combat Extremism and Hate Crime* and the *2021-2022 Action Plan to Combat Extremism and Hate Crime*, which defined as one of its three strategic goals improving protection and assistance to victims of crimes, including religiously motivated crimes. The action plan outlined specific tasks for various ministries, including the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Education, Finance, and the MOC, in fighting extremism and hate crimes, including those against religious groups. Steps the document outlined included “raising public awareness about extremist activities, initiatives by state regulatory and security bodies to reduce hate speech on the internet, strategic communication to combat xenophobia and racism, education and prevention programs at schools, specialized training for law enforcement, and assistance to victims.”

On January 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Israeli Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Social Equality, held a commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day dedicated to Jewish diplomats who were murdered or persecuted during the Holocaust. Speakers included Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský and Israeli Minister for Social Justice Meirav Cohen. Speakers stressed the importance of standing against antisemitism and fighting Holocaust denial and distortion.

On January 27, the Senate, in cooperation with the FJC, again organized a ceremony to honor victims of the Holocaust. President of the Senate Miloš Vystrčil, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Markéta Pekarová Adamová, Holocaust survivor Helga Hošková-Weissová, and FJC Chairman Petr Papoušek cited the need for religious tolerance and active opposition to hate and aggression of any form. The event was broadcast live on state-owned television.

In November, the government organized within the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union a conference of countries that endorsed the 2009 Terezin Declaration on Holocaust-Era Assets and Related Issues. Speakers included Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský, Israeli Minister of Social Equality Cohen, and Vice President of the European Commission Věra Jourová. The conference addressed issues of rising antisemitism, the need to mitigate injustices committed during the Holocaust, and the role of education. Foreign Minister Lipavský stated, “Now we face explosions of racism and religious intolerance. If we do not want history to repeat itself, we must continue remembering the Holocaust and leave no space for disinformation or distortion of truth.”

In April, the 17th annual public reading of Holocaust victims’ names took place in Prague and 23 other cities throughout the country. Public figures who participated in the reading included Senator Jiří Drahoš, Mayor of Prague Zdeněk Hřib, and members of the diplomatic community.

In April, after a two-year pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizers resumed the annual Culture against Antisemitism Festival and march. The organizers read remarks prepared by Senate President Vystrčil, Chamber of Deputies Speaker Adamová, and Prague City Councilor Jan Wolf, who condemned all manifestations of antisemitism and stressed the need to nurture religious tolerance.

During the year the government provided grants for religiously oriented cultural activities, including the annual Night of Churches held in several cities, the Red Wednesday project in support of victims of religious persecution, a liturgical festival of St. Cyril and Methodius in Velehrad, the annual Concert in Memory of Holocaust Victims, the annual 2022 Hussite Festival, a program of the Rabbi Feder Cultural and Educational Center; the Culture against Antisemitism Festival and March, and the 16th annual Festival of Religious Music.

According to the FJC, the Ministry of Interior continued to provide security to the Jewish community and Jewish sites based on a memorandum of cooperation signed in 2016.

The government-funded Endowment Fund for Holocaust Victims, established by the FJC, contributed CZK 4 million (\$181,000) to 13 institutions providing health and social care to approximately 450 Holocaust survivors.

The country is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

NGO In IUSTITIA stated it received reports of four religiously motivated hate crimes in the first nine months of the year – two incidents against Jews and one against Muslims – compared with four such cases (three against Jews and one against Muslims) in all of 2021. In 2021, the most recent year data were available, the MOI reported 37 criminal offenses with antisemitic motives and seven with anti-Muslim motives, compared with 27 and nine offenses, respectively, in 2020. The MOI reported only incidents that it investigated. Neither In IUSTITIA nor the MOI reported any details of the crimes.

The FJC, which monitored the internet for instances of antisemitism, reported 1,128 antisemitic incidents in 2021, an increase of 29 percent over the 874 incidents in 2020 and 62 percent over the 694 incidents in 2019. According to the FJC, the largest increase was in antisemitic hate speech on the internet, which accounted for 99 percent of the incidents. The FJC attributed this increase to improved digital monitoring tools, rising political polarization, and a move from the real to the virtual world because of COVID-19-related restrictions.

In addition to online hate speech, the 2021 incidents included one of physical assault, three of property damage, and five of harassment. In one incident in April, a group of youths confronted a Jewish teenager in Prague, calling her “a dirty Jewess” who “should be gassed.” One of the youths pushed and hit the girl, who reportedly did not suffer significant injury. Both the aggressors and the girl were students at the same school. In one of the incidents of vandalism in May, unknown persons poured red paint on the entrance to the Israeli Embassy in Prague. The incident occurred prior to an anti-Israeli demonstration, “Solidarity and Protest against the Attacks on the Residents of the Schiech Jarrak in Jerusalem.” In September, unknown persons damaged a wooden bench in the Jerusalem Synagogue in Prague, which is open to tourists. The perpetrators sprayed the bench with red paint and carved “SS” into the wood.

The FJC stated that 72.9 percent of the online incidents included mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, vulgar, and stereotypical claims and conspiracy theories; 19.9 percent involved “new antisemitism” (a category that includes, according to FJC, demonization of Israel, double standards, and delegitimization of Israel) and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement; 4.2 percent of incidents consisted of threatening, approving, justifying, or calling for physical aggression; and 2.8 percent involved Holocaust denial. The FJC’s report concluded that the country remains safe for the Jewish community.

At year’s end, the 2021 case in which police charged four individuals and two companies associated with the publishing firm Guidemedia with Holocaust denial for producing a Czech translation of Germar Rudolf’s book, *Dissecting the Holocaust*, was still pending. Police continued to investigate Guidemedia for publishing an antisemitic children’s book, *Poisonous Mushroom*, first published in Germany in 1938 as part of antisemitic Nazi propaganda. In December 2021, the District Court in Prague Five remanded to the prosecutor for further investigation the case of Emerich Drtina of the Naše vojsko (Our Army) company. In January 2021, authorities charged Drina and his company with promoting a movement suppressing human rights and freedoms for publishing a 2021 calendar featuring Nazi figures. The case was pending at year’s end.

In January, the District Court in Zdar nad Sazavou convicted publisher The Bodyart Press of denying the Holocaust and justifying genocide. The court fined the company CZK 45,000 (\$2,000) and its executive officer CZK 15,000 (\$680). The Bodyart Press published and distributed *The Myth of the Six Million*, a Holocaust denial book authored by a deceased U.S. historian.

In April, the Budapest-based NGO Tom Lantos Institute issued the results of its study of antisemitic prejudice in the four Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), based on survey data collected in June 2021. According to the study, 36 percent of 2,097 survey respondents ages 18-74 in the Czech Republic could be classified as moderately or strongly antisemitic. The study cited stereotypical statements regarding Jews and asked respondents the degree to which they fully agreed, rather agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, did not know, rather disagreed, or fully disagreed. The proportion who responded they “fully agree” or “rather agree” with the following statements were: “Jews have too much influence in the Czech Republic” (5 percent); “Jews

seek to extend their influence on the global economy” (17 percent); “Jews are more inclined than others to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (10 percent); “it would be reasonable to limit the number of Jews in certain occupations” (3 percent); and “it would be best if Jews left this country” (3 percent). Conversely, the proportion who responded they “fully agree” or “rather agree” with the following statements were: “More should be taught in school about the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews so that this does not happen again” (64 percent); “We should defend the Jews of our country against the antisemites” (52 percent).

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) cited five cases of antisemitic threats against members of the Jewish community in 2021, one by phone, one in a letter, and three on social media. Four of the cases included death threats. ODIHR sourced reporting of the cases to the FJC.

The ODIHR report, citing In IUSTITIA, included two incidents of threats against Muslims in 2021. In one incident, colleagues at work repeatedly subjected a woman married to an Algerian Muslim man to racist insults and threatened her with violence due to her husband’s ethnicity and religion. In another incident, family members threatened a Muslim man and his wife with violence due to their religion.

In September, the Jewish community unveiled a memorial that includes Jewish gravestone fragments. The communist government took the fragments from a 19th-century Jewish cemetery in the 1980s and cut them into cobblestones to be placed across the capital. The Prague mayor’s office returned the fragments to the Jewish community in 2020.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy representatives continued to engage government officials from the MOC on religious issues, including religious tolerance and developments on restoration of the Prostějov Jewish cemetery.

The embassy worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli government to organize an event on International Holocaust Remembrance Day

on January 27 to commemorate Jewish diplomats who were murdered or persecuted during the Holocaust. In her remarks at the ceremony, the Chargé d’Affaires underscored the importance that the United States places on achieving a measure of justice for Holocaust survivors and heirs, including property restitution and compensation, adding that “The United States remains firmly committed to promoting Holocaust remembrance and countering rising global antisemitism.... Seeking to bring closure to Holocaust-era issues left outstanding since the end of World War II...”

Embassy and State Department officials worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including with its Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Robert Řehák, on the Terezin Declaration Conference that took place in Prague on November 3, helping to plan panel discussions and draft the final statement of the conference. The conference addressed issues of restitution of Holocaust-era assets, social care for Holocaust victims, and Holocaust remembrance and education. The U.S. Secretary of State conveyed a video address, during which he stated that restitution and compensation through the Terezin Declaration help to memorialize the truth about Nazi atrocities. He said that we must continue to speak out about the Shoah, so that its hideous crimes are never again repeated. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues and the Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Holocaust Issues assessed that the Czech Republic had made considerable progress on restitution and remembrance issues, but they encouraged it to provide pensions for Holocaust survivors, address heirless property claims, and offer more broad-based Holocaust education.

In May, embassy officials expressed support for the restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Prostějov during a meeting with Mayor František Jura.

The Chargé and other embassy officials continued to meet with representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to religious freedom and tolerance and to hear their views on interfaith relations.

The embassy provided \$10,000 to the 1942-2022 – We Remember Project, a commemorative educational and cultural event organized in Pacov on the 80th anniversary of deportations of Czech Jews from the rural areas of the Vysočina region to the Terezin Ghetto. Included in the project was the production and

screening of the documentary film, *A Sacred Space: Building a Memory*, about Torah scrolls originally from the Pacov synagogue that Jewish congregations use in the United States.